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## Honorary Degree Citation: Nikki Giovanni

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## Nikki Giovanni

### *Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, Honoris Causa*

Nikki Giovanni has lived a life of poetry and revolution. She has documented and shared her own life experience alongside the broader cultural struggle for racial justice and equality in more than 40 volumes of verse, memoirs, criticism, and children's fiction. In 1968, she published her first book of poems, "Black Feeling, Black Talk". The Guardian described this first publication as "one of the single most important volumes of modern African-American poetry."

Within the following year, Ms. Giovanni published a second book of poetry, taught at Queens College and Rutgers University, established the Cincinnati Black Arts Festival, gave new revolutionary voice to the New York poetry scene, became a regular contributor at Negro Digest, and gave birth to her son. This was the audacious beginning of her long journey of activism and literary excellence.

Ms. Giovanni's words courageously lay bare injustices. But her voice is gentle, too, recalling the simplicity of eating from a summer garden in Tennessee, soothing the reader with her ancestral Southern cadence.

Ms. Giovanni's talent has garnered prestigious awards, such as the National Book Award; seven NAACP Image Awards; the American Book Award; the Carl Sandberg Literary Award; and a Grammy nomination in the Spoken Word category.

Ms. Giovanni has served as visiting and distinguished professor at universities from New York to Texas, reading her poetry on campuses and at festivals around the world, inspiring students and peers alike.

She is a distinguished professor at Virginia Tech University. Following the tragedy in 2007, the university president called upon Ms. Giovanni to bring the healing powers of poetry to the campus. It was Ms. Giovanni's Convocation speech that reminded us that as we mourn, our charge is to make a better world. She said, "We will continue to invent the future through our blood and tears and through all our sadness."

For her outstanding literary achievements, for her immeasurable contributions to the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Arts Movement in American literature, for her role as an educator, spanning more than five decades during which she has shared her incomparable gifts with countless students, and for her enduring dedication to justice and equality, the Board of Trustees of Governors State University is proud to award Nikki Giovanni the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa, and to welcome her to our community of inspirational scholars, artists, and educators.

